



Federal Libraries and Information Centers: A National Resource

More than 2,000 libraries and information centers operated by the federal government form an information infrastructure that extends around the globe to serve federal workers and the American public. From Washington, D.C. to Alaska and from Guam to Italy, the nation's libraries and information centers undergird and strengthen federal programs. Located in all branches of the federal government and its independent agencies, they further their agencies' missions by providing access to information where and when it is needed, using information technology to augment traditional services. Federal libraries are also keepers of the nation's collection of books, manuscripts, maps, pictorial records, scientific data, historical documents, and rare materials.

Federal libraries and information centers range from very large (such as the Library of Congress and the Defense Technical Information Center) to very small, one-person facilities. Many smaller libraries support military personnel wherever they are stationed; some larger libraries have collections devoted to a single field, e.g., environmental science, medicine, education. Many agencies, such as the Army Corps of Engineers, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the Department of Veterans Affairs, have field offices which form library networks of their own.

In serving their agencies, libraries and information centers serve the people—the taxpayers—who depend on the federal government to manage the country's laws and regulations, to provide social programs and to pursue foreign policy initiatives. Many libraries and information centers are open to the public, while others limit their services to their own department or agency because of mission, staffing, or budgetary constraints.

To assist federal libraries and information centers and provide leadership for the future, in 1965 the Library of Congress and the Bureau of the Budget (now the Office of Management and Budget) established the Federal Library Committee, later renamed the Federal Library and Information Center Committee (FLICC). FLICC's mission is to foster excellence in federal library and information services through interagency cooperation and to provide guidance and direction for the Federal Library and Information Network (FEDLINK).

Whereas FLICC focuses primarily on information policy issues, FEDLINK serves federal libraries and information centers as their purchasing, training, and resource-sharing consortium. FEDLINK's contractual services are open to any federal entity and offer significant discounts. Since its beginning in 1976, FEDLINK has become the largest library network in the nation and the only network operating worldwide.

The history of federal libraries and information centers begins with the founding of the nation. They are partners in accomplishing the nation's goals—a valuable strength and source of vital information.

For more information on federal libraries and information centers, visit the FLICC/FEDLINK Web site at <http://www.loc.gov/flicc> or review the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) "1994 Survey of Federal Libraries and Information Centers in the United States" at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs96/web/96247.asp>. ■